

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, issued the following statement after meetings resulted in an agreement that allows New York to begin building a new, dedicated third track to accommodate high-speed trains.

“This is welcome news and helps give us confidence that high-speed rail will be coming to Upstate New York,” Slaughter said. “This agreement allows the planning and construction to continue moving forward. I appreciate CSX’s readiness to do their part to make the promise of high-speed rail in New York a reality. I also know that we could not do this without the commitment of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and the Federal Railroad Administration who have been strong allies of New York on this front since day 1. On a separate note, I am happy that yesterday the federal government officially announced \$1 million in planning funds to the state of New York for work on this project.”

Background

On January 28th New York was awarded \$153 million in federal funding to complete High-Speed Rail (HSR) projects in Upstate New York. In order to advance the projects, New York and CSX had to enter into a framework agreement governing the progression of a study leading to the funding, design, and construction of certain freight and passenger rail projects between Buffalo, NY and Albany, NY.

Negotiations stalled when New York State and CSX could not come to an agreement on several key principles, including the distance between freight and passenger trains.

At Congresswoman Slaughter’s request, Secretary LaHood convened a meeting on May 7 at the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) with Deputy Secretary John Porcari (a Rochester native), Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Administrator Joe Szabo, FRA Deputy Administrator Karen Rae, Governor David Paterson’s Senior Advisor for Transportation and Infrastructure Tim Gilchrist, along with officials from Amtrak, CSX and the New York Department of Transportation to kick start the negotiations.

Out of that meeting came a commitment from DOT and FRA to have Karen Rae assume a larger role in the project. After several meetings over the last three weeks with all the stakeholders at the table, an agreement was reached today which takes into account CSX’s safety guidelines when determining distance between freight and passenger rail.

As a result of this critical agreement, NY, CSX and FRA can now move forward with the planning and design of the projects awarded ARRA funding which will bring us several steps closer to HSR in New York.

Slaughter formed the Upstate Caucus to advocate for Western and Upstate New York, and members of the caucus have pushed for high-speed rail funding for the region. The FY 2010 funding bill contains over \$4.5 million for high-speed rail in upstate.